

FRONTLINE

A newsletter from the WA State Employee Assistance Program

Questions



Competition makes around-the-clock communication almost essential. I don't hear many complaints, but are employees at risk for burnout by being so responsive to customers and work demands? How much pressure can I put on them?



What can a supervisor or manager do to facilitate the creating of a positive work culture that promotes collaboration, innovation, and risk-taking by employees to maximize their productivity?

Answers



Burnout and lower productivity may be consequences of overwork, but realize that some employees like checking e-mail in the off-hours, first thing in the morning, and even before retiring in the evening—even though doing so usually violates overtime regulations. Others may sleep better knowing what awaits them as they walk through the door the next day. Technology allows employees to intervene earlier with problems and reduce their magnitude. Many organizations exist only because of such advances in communication technology. Work-life balance is important. Employees must define and redefine what this ultimately means to them. Good communication with your employees and willingness to negotiate with them can help ensure they are happy, which is the bottom line. Do you have this sort of relationship with them? If so, you increase the likelihood of having excited and engaged employees who go the extra mile, love work, and don't burn out.



Terry Jones, the founder of Travelocity.com, gave a keynote address at an annual meeting of corporate executives last month. His presentation focused on how to create a work culture that generates enthusiasm for innovation. Summarized below are key points he imparted to his audience. See which ones you can institute as a line manager in your work unit: 1) Don't be afraid to fail. "If you don't fail, you're not having enough at bats;" 2) "Kill the project, not the person" if an idea doesn't work; 3) Study your failures like football teams review tapes of unsuccessful plays; 4) Don't dismiss out of hand ideas of line staff and lower-level employees. This is where many great ideas originate; 5) Surround yourself with diverse talents that can synergize. Source: [University of Texas, Press Release](#)

Frontline Supervisor

Questions



I worry about taking action to correct performance with some employees because being too determined could lead to dismissal, thereby causing me to incur the anger and disapproval of top management. How does the EAP help these situations?



Can you suggest specific language to use to make a Formal Referral when a potential disciplinary action exists if performance doesn't improve? I know to use the EAP in supervision, but I think hearing all the "pieces" to include would be helpful.



What sort of attitude should I display when referring an employee to the EAP? Should I be serious and stern, or try to sell the employee on going with a smile and excitement? Perhaps my demeanor should be somewhere in between.

Answers



HR is a good resource to help supervisors feel more secure in taking action to correct employee performance. The support of your HR at the front end makes for no surprises for management at the back end. The EAP is also available for a workplace consultation to help you with these issues. Brainstorming with an EA Professional can give you insight and tools for how performance issues can be addressed. Most employees will visit an EAP when formally referred by the supervisor, and most also accept help and return with better levels of performance.



What you say to employees may vary depending on the circumstances of the referral, so consulting with your EAP regarding each referral is a good idea. However, the following is a good general approach: "In light of our discussion regarding your ongoing performance problems, I'm formally referring you to the EAP because these problems haven't been corrected. The EAP is a voluntary program and you aren't required to use them, but they may be able to help you. Regardless whether you use them or not, this problem needs to be corrected."



Remember it's the employee's responsibility to accept a referral to the EAP, regardless of your approach. Your focus on performance and what happens if it improves or what happens if it doesn't improve is what will make all the difference in employee motivation. Therefore, don't use the EAP as a punitive device. Doing so can prompt your employee to reject the entire idea of using the EAP, whereas a more supportive approach would facilitate cooperation. See your employees as individuals and the valuable resources they truly are. Approach them with hope and a sense of opportunity and optimism. If you display this affirming attitude in your dealings with them, you'll increase the EAP's appeal. This "program of attraction" dynamic is an important one in the promotion of any professional counseling, assistance, and self-help program.

Notes